

The Bureau:
My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI
by William C. Sullivan
with Bill Brown

(Norton; \$12.95)

The life and career of William Cornelius Sullivan are the stuff of a second-rate political novel. They contain just the right balance of ambition, intrigue, skulduggery, irrationality, and revenge—with a dash of nobility thrown in for good measure.

A simple man of humble New England origins, Sullivan left his job with the Internal Revenue Service in Boston to become an FBI agent in 1941. From the start, a whole new world opened to him, and he had some extraordinary adventures: chasing fugitives around the country, solving heinous crimes and simple ones, investigating suspected wartime spies in the Midwest, enjoying the camaraderie of a group of men whose image was ever more glamorous. Sullivan, however, was no run-of-the-mill G-man. He was intellectually curious, and before long he became one of the Bureau's rising experts on the communist menace; he worked espionage, counterintelligence, and internal security cases, developing a whole coterie of young admirers and followers who shared his excitement in that field. Sullivan stood out from the crowd: a quick-witted, wiry, fast-talking fellow, often disheveled and disorganized, he always looked older than he was. He was a worrier, and he would read books (and underline and annotate them) while less serious agents went off to bars and football games.

Like many other FBI men of his generation, Bill Sullivan aspired to succeed the aging patriarch, J. Edgar Hoover, as director. The primary evidence of this was the frequency and vehemence with which he denied it. Denial was essential if one wanted to stay in the charmed circle, because to talk of replacing Hoover was to hint at his mortality and fallibility, two problems the director would not admit he had.

For years—even decades—Sullivan played along, outdoing himself to please Hoover. He developed new ways of investigating Communists and other "subversives." He designed, honed, and implemented many of the Bureau's programs (COINTELPRO), later

adapted with such ease to the Ku Klux Klan, the civil rights movement, antiwar activists, and others who questioned the American way.

But there came a time when Sullivan began to annoy Hoover. As assistant director in charge of the Domestic Intelligence Division, he was too outspoken—quarreling with some of the central elements of the Hoover dogma (by suggesting publicly, for example, that the Communist party of the USA was no longer a threat to national security), making trouble in the Bureau's executive conference (whose ironic official duty was to vote unanimously, in the style of an old-fashioned communist central committee, to endorse every decision and the opinion of the director), and challenging some of the FBI's twisted priorities. Hoover chafed over such insubordination, yet continued to favor Sullivan with choice assignments. Never was their love/hate relationship better symbolized than in the summer of 1970, after their feud had already become an open secret inside the Bureau and out, when Hoover named Sullivan to the number-three job in the FBI, as the replacement for Cartha D. DeLoach (Lyndon Johnson's favorite FBI agent, Sullivan's leading enemy and rival, and another early Hoover sycophant whose relationship with the director had soured).

Even in such a high-ranking job, Sullivan resisted pacification. He gave speeches that annoyed the director, had suspicious liaisons with officials of the Nixon administration, and stood up for the victims of the director's arbitrary personnel policies and disciplinary system. Sullivan cooperated in a White House effort to reinstitute some domestic spying that Hoover, for reasons of personal reputation, had suspended, and he wrote the director some outrageously insulting letters. Thus provoked, Hoover took the extraordinary step of forcing Sullivan out of the Bureau by changing the lock on his office door.

Hoover died seven months later, and Sullivan was to spend the rest of his own life remaining of Hoover's image and reputa-

tion. For a time he held make-work jobs (first with an insurance crime-prevention institute in Connecticut and then with the "Office of National Narcotics Intelligence," a superfluous and somewhat mysterious agency established briefly by Nixon's Justice Department). He had some strange—and never fully explained—dealings with John Dean and others in the midst of the Watergate cover-up, although he later narrowly averted indictment over his involvement with Nixon's 17 secret wiretaps only by spilling various beans to the special prosecutor's office.

But mostly Sullivan passed his post-FBI time at his retirement home in Sugar Hill, New Hampshire, working on his hate-Hoover campaign. An essential tool in that campaign was the supply of documents he had brought with him from the government. During long, rambling sessions with reporters and investigators who came to call on him, he would leap out of his armchair and disappear for a few minutes to forage through his extensive but chaotic files, returning with a choice memorandum or a tattered copy of a juicy letter that demonstrated his point. Sometimes the document would be trotted out on various occasions to make several separate points, and sometimes the yarns and recollections would trail off inconclusively. But Sullivan was an "informed source" extraordinaire, and few people complained about the long journey to see him. When no one had phoned or visited for a while, Sullivan would take the initiative and call one of his favorite leakees—sometimes from the psychiatric unit of a New Hampshire hospital—to put a new twist on an old story. Usually something would get into print or on the air, and that made him happy. If things came out in a way unfavorable to him, however, Sullivan's rage knew no bounds; he once threatened to kill me because he was unhappy with the published excerpts of a book I was writing.

But ultimately, nobody told things exactly the way Bill Sullivan wanted them told, and so he finally set out to write his memoirs, with the help of a television producer, Bill Brown. In the midst of that project, on November 9, 1977, Sullivan was shot and killed in an early-morning hunting accident near his home—an event that excited the assassination buffs and conspiracy theorists for a while, but bore no fruit for them.

Now comes the book, a loosely organized and frustrating collection of

tidbits that is an almost perfect reflection of Bill Sullivan—the man, the bureaucrat, the raconteur, the exaggerator and the teller of not-quite-funny jokes. It is a book in which he posthumously settles a few scores (with DeLoach and other FBI folk) and reveals much about himself: his desire to be known as a "liberal Democrat," his effort to sound and act like one of the boys (the word "damn" appears so often that it begins to stand out), and his naive contention that his motives were always pure.

Many of Sullivan's tales are trivial and inconsequential, but a few are mischievous. There is his own impromptu three-bullet-but-one-assassin version of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963, for example, in which he departs totally from the story (and, presumably, the evidence) that the FBI has stood by for more than 15 years.

Perhaps the most useful part of the book is Sullivan's chapter on espionage, where he offers some startling revelations about Soviet and American penetration of each other's intelligence networks. His suggestion that there was for many years an undetected Soviet mole inside the New York field office of the FBI is, of course, a troubling one. So is his triumphant story of what happened when Bureau agents captured a US Navy enlisted man named Cornelius Drummond who was passing secrets to the Russians: "Drummond didn't offer any resistance at all, but the boys gave him and the other Soviet agents a beating just for good measure." So much for William Sullivan, the latter-

day civil libertarian.

Finally, it is difficult to know how many stories in Sullivan's book can be trusted. In one, for example, he has Lyndon Johnson ordering the FBI to get involved in the investigation of Edward M. Kennedy's 1969 accident at Chappaquiddick. (Richard Nixon was president at the time, of course, and LBJ was back on his ranch.) But with all of its (and his) failings, Sullivan's book is important for two reasons. One is the further evidence it offers of the astonishing paranoia and infighting that prevailed in the highest ranks of the FBI for many decades. Listen to Sullivan on the subject of the discovery of secret FBI wiretap logs in the White House in 1973:

The existence of the logs never would have been known to the press if it hadn't been for some of my old enemies at the FBI. They thought by leaking the story of my involvement with the logs to the press . . . that they could block me from consideration for the job I wanted: a special 'reorganization consultant' to the FBI which would have resulted in their dismissal.

The second reason is something it does not do: explain why no one on the inside ever blew the whistle on J. Edgar Hoover, one of the great tyrants and frauds of American history. If Sullivan had, then he might have become the hero he wanted us to believe he was.

Sanford J. Ungar

Sanford J. Ungar, managing editor of *Foreign Policy* magazine, is the author of *FBI: An Uncensored Look Behind the Walls* (Atlantic-Little, Brown).